

Mankato Area Public Schools and the City of Mankato, Minnesota



Communication Action Plan



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Table of Contents

Guiding Principles and Philosophy	3
Mission and Vision.....	4
Background	5
City of Mankato Communication Goals	6
Mankato Area Public Schools' Communication Goals.....	6
City of Mankato Key Messages and Communication Themes	7
Mankato Area Public Schools' Key Messages and Communication Themes.....	7
Target Audiences	8
Communication Toolbox	9
About the Organizational Logos	10
Public Relations Philosophy	10
City of Mankato and Mankato Area Public Schools Joint Communication Projects	11
City of Mankato Communication Projects.....	12
Mankato Area Public Schools' Communication Projects	12
Public Information Director Job Description	13-14
Public Information Assistant Job Description.....	15

Addendum:

ICMA IQ Report featuring the City of Mankato and Mankato Area Public Schools
Communication Partnership

Guiding Principles and Philosophy

Plan your work,
work your plan.

This plan is based on the following principles and philosophy, which serve to guide its overall development:

1. Tell our own story versus expecting someone else to do it

It is the news media's job to report news. It is the respective organization's job to be accountable and keep citizens informed on the state of the city and schools. When residents are well-informed, they can participate more effectively in their government and make the best decisions on matters impacting their lives.

2. Be proactive versus reactive

It is the intent of the City of Mankato and Mankato Area Public Schools' communication program to take a proactive approach. Its purpose is to plan and carry out communications to achieve goals.

3. Promote decentralized communication versus centralized

A decentralized communications system complements operating with a spirit of full disclosure. Decentralized communication is a practical way to operate in a large organization since an obvious source of information is the person who works in a respective area each day. The goal is to have all city and school staff working toward the communications goals of the city and schools respectively.



4. Strong themes versus scattered messages

A communication program built on strong themes is more effective than a program with scattered and unrelated messages. Major themes are derived from strategic plans created by the Mankato City Council and the Mankato Area Public School Board. Several complimentary themes and communication priorities come from focus groups and various groups connected to the city and schools. Key themes will be communicated frequently in a variety of ways, using simple repetitive messages.

5. We adopt Mankato Area Council for Quality's philosophy

"Customers don't care how much we know until they know how much we care."



6. Communication needs to be appropriate but take a risk

In addition to being factual and professional, marketing and communication messages should be easy to read, entertaining, eye-catching, positive, and imaginative to peak interest and capture the attention of the stakeholders.

7. Mankato Area Public Schools is committed to partnering with the City of Mankato

To avoid costly duplication to citizens, Mankato Area Public Schools is open to communication partnerships within its geographical boundaries.

"Out of intense complexities, intense simplicities emerge."
Winston Churchill

Communication Action Plan

Mission and Vision



The City of Mankato is leading the way as a prosperous, diverse regional community.

Responsive
Efficient
Greater Good
Innovative
Open
Neighborly



Our mission is to provide effective educational opportunities for all learners to acquire the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to be responsible citizens in a diverse, changing, and global society.

Our vision is to continually improve our Mankato Area Education System to ensure that all learners are provided with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed for them to be productive citizens in the ever-changing 21st century environment.

Background

The community is better served by informed residents.

Well-planned communications are the heart of a successful public information effort. A communication program built on strong themes is generally most effective. The primary focus is to be in alignment with local citizens. A high priority for city government and public schools is to effectively communicate with taxpayers. The purpose of this communication plan is to highlight priorities and take a proactive approach in planning and executing communication. Residents want staff responsive to their needs. Interactive opportunities with citizens and the community will be sought. Two-way communication is the core to knowing what citizens want.

Communication themes come from the Mankato City Council and Mankato Area Public School Board. The Mankato City Council and Mankato Area Public School Board are likely to be perceived as a body, not individuals. City Councilors and School Board Members share an interest in creating public perception among the people they serve. Public information efforts can be key in communicating the City Council and School Board's collective message.

City of Mankato

The communication plan is based on the City of Mankato Strategic Plan.

Mankato Area Public Schools

This communication plan is based on Mankato Area Public Schools' Strategic Plan.

A general assessment of Mankato Area Public Schools internal and external communications was completed prior to the development of this plan. Findings, recommendations, and results from this assessment were also incorporated into this communication plan.

Communication priorities and themes are based on the strategic plans for the City of Mankato and Mankato Area Public Schools.

City of Mankato Communication Goals

- ◆ Increase awareness, interest and participation of the community in their city government.
- ◆ Be accountable to stakeholders for money spent on city government by informing stakeholders on what is happening.
- ◆ Identify potential opportunities and develop a communications strategy to deal with them.
- ◆ Strengthen public confidence to build trust in city government.
- ◆ Display and maintain a visible presence in the community.
- ◆ Communicate with residents of neighboring jurisdiction because of all the interrelationship. Many neighbors do business in Mankato and may use city services.
- ◆ Place emphasis on target communication themes based on current city government topics and events; and on the internal, external, and community and regional goals in Mankato's strategic planning efforts.

Mankato Area Public Schools Communication Goals

- ◆ Be accountable to stakeholders for money spent on public schools by informing stakeholders on what is happening.
- ◆ Retain and attract students.
- ◆ Increase awareness, interest and participation of the community.
- ◆ Identify potential opportunities and develop a communications strategy to deal with them.
- ◆ Increase awareness, interest and participation of parents.
- ◆ Strengthen public confidence in public schools.
- ◆ Display and maintain a visible presence in the community.

City of Mankato Key Messages and Communication Themes

Values / Key Messages

- R**esponsive...prompt to respond and serve.
- E**fficient...highest performance at greatest economy.
- G**reater Good...serve for the good of community and region.
- I**nnovative...embracing new ideas and methods to improve service delivery.
- O**pen...spirit of accessibility in policy making and operation.
- N**eighborly...concern and compassion for others.

- ◆ Quality of Life
- ◆ Downtown Development -- city center renaissance
- ◆ Orderly Growth -- urban service matrix
- ◆ Natural Environment -- great river valley recreational area
- ◆ Taxpayer Efficiency -- budget for outcomes
- ◆ Neighborhood Preservation -- our future is built on our past
- ◆ Economic Development -- Mankato market center
- ◆ Greater Mankato Region -- region building

Mankato Area Public Schools Key Messages and Communication Themes

- ◆ Learners are the focus at Mankato Area Public Schools.
- ◆ Education for life.
- ◆ Diversity in school population strengthens our schools and prepares learners for the global society.
- ◆ An innovative philosophy supports life-long learning. Learners must be given choices, develop self-worth, and be challenged accordingly.
- ◆ Integrated technology provides learners with the best education possible.
- ◆ Community and business partnerships maximize ownership to schools. Four out of five households do not have students in Mankato Area Public Schools although they are funding public schools.
- ◆ A commitment to communication with the stakeholders contributes to accountability.
- ◆ Human resources are Mankato Area Public Schools most valuable asset.
- ◆ Mankato Area Public Schools rank in the top one-third nationally as winners of the "Gold Medal School" Award* and have been nationally recognized with the "School Match" award** for meeting the needs and expectations of families choosing schools.
- ◆ Schools unite to form one organization--Mankato Area Public Schools.
- ◆ Mankato Area Public Schools value and practice continuous improvement.
- ◆ Innovative choices are available throughout Mankato Area Public Schools.

* *Expansion Management Magazine.*

***School Match of Columbus, Ohio.*

Target Audiences

External Audiences:

- ◆ Citizens/taxpayers/residents – Mankato Area Public Schools is designated as School District #77 which serves the communities of Mankato, North Mankato, Eagle Lake, and Madison Lake (represents approximately 26,409 households and business):

Mankato	18,858
North Mankato.....	5,306
Eagle Lake	1,124
Madison Lake.....	<u>1,121</u>
Total.....	26,409

All taxpayers are stakeholders of Mankato Area Public Schools.

- a) Parents
- b) Non-parent taxpayers:
70% of the households do not have learners in Mankato Area Public Schools.

- ◆ News Media
- ◆ Economic development/prospective businesses
- ◆ Blue Earth and Nicollet County residents
- ◆ Seniors
- ◆ Day care providers
- ◆ Youth
- ◆ Business community
- ◆ Realtors
- ◆ Service clubs
- ◆ New residents
- ◆ Opinion leaders
- ◆ Prospective residents
- ◆ The region
- ◆ Visitors
- ◆ Ministerial Association
- ◆ Residents and government officials in bordering communities.
- ◆ Legislators

Internal Audiences:

- ◆ City and schools staff–everyone within the city and school organization is in the communication office. A decentralized communication system compliments openness and provides the most practical means of communication information.

Communication Toolbox

Valuable tools and mediums used to communicate and market messages.
This is also dubbed as the public information staff's "creation station."

Presentational Software

Sight/sound communication tools including
digital video and
other mediums as they become available.

Interactive television

Public access television

Direct mail pieces-Hotsheets, News Notes

Newsletters

Special events (such as tours, open houses)

Flyers - Posters - Jingles

24-hour telephone lines

News released - radio, television, newspaper

Basics:

- ◆ Write for the audience, using plain talk.
- ◆ Simple, repetitive messages are best using a variety of tools.
- ◆ Consistent theme are more effective than scattered messages.
- ◆ Creative, imaginative and appropriate are the criteria used with communication techniques.
- ◆ Honesty and a spirit of full disclosure are key.

Utility bill inserts

Electronic mail

Personalized letters

Specialty items

Brochures and print projects

Direct Contact/One-to-one

Direct response to viewpoints

Neighborhood meetings

Newspaper advertising

Post-it notes on daily/weekly newspapers

Web Pages - Internet

Displays

Public service announcements

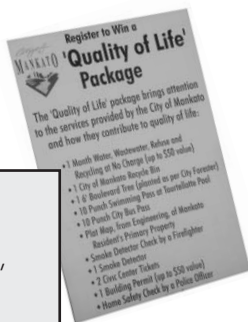
News conferences -

news media kits

It is necessary to always be on the lookout for new and innovative tools and technologies to expand efforts and communicate more effectively.



Communication Action Plan



About the Organizational Logos



Since the logo is the official symbol for the City of Mankato and Mankato Area Public Schools organizations, it is important that each are used generously and properly. The logos are the most important way in which citizens/taxpayers identify the City of Mankato or Mankato Area Public Schools' documents and property.

The logos respectively designate the City of Mankato or Mankato Area Public Schools as a whole. Individual city service symbols can be used with the City of Mankato logo; or school logos with the Mankato Area Public School's logo.

A logo and identity style guide for the City of Mankato or Mankato Area Public Schools can be obtained by calling the Public Information Office at 387-8516.

Public Relations Philosophy



We need to treat citizens with respect and dignity.

It is important to create an environment that leads citizens to have faith and confidence in the City of Mankato and Mankato Area Public Schools.

We agree with the Mankato Area Council For Quality philosophy:

"Customers don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

City of Mankato and Mankato Area Public Schools Joint Communication Projects

To avoid costly duplication, Mankato Area Public Schools and the City of Mankato have made a commitment to partner on public information. Although we provide different public service, we serve common stakeholders. In summary, partnership goals are to:

- ◆ Avoid duplication, save money and share costs. We cannot afford all of the separateness in local government.
- ◆ Problem solve among overlapping jurisdictions.
- ◆ Promote together the value of education and city services.
- ◆ Become more efficient because we are informed on each other's issues.

Joint Communication Projects

- “Here to Serve You” brochure. Is distributed in City of Mankato utility bills and distributed in new resident packets throughout the year.
- Include Mankato Area Public Schools dates in the City of Mankato calendar published annually.
- Mankato Minute -- which also air on local public access television.
- Joint validated citizen satisfaction survey.
- Crisis communication team also known as “Area News Consortium” meets periodically. Crisis communication team members include public information staff from:
 - ◆ American Red Cross
 - ◆ Blue Earth County
 - ◆ City of Mankato and Mankato Area Public Schools
 - ◆ Immanuel St. Joseph's Hospital- Mayo Health System
 - ◆ Minnesota Department of Transportation
 - ◆ Minnesota State University, Mankato
 - ◆ Nicollet County
 - ◆ South Central College
 - ◆ Mankato Clinic
- City of Mankato and Mankato Area Public Schools media handbook developed. Provide staff training as needed.
- City of Mankato/Mankato Area Public Schools' newsletter to the taxpayers is distributed on April 1 and September 1.
- Organize and market Mankato City Council and Mankato Area Public Schools Board “citizen tour” as a way to communicate capital projects and expenditures.
- Develop and implement communication plans for individual initiatives.
- Periodically plan open house at intergovernmental center and offer a “Quality of Life” drawing opportunity.

City of Mankato Communication Projects

- ___ Develop and release Outline Newsletter monthly.
- ___ Utility bill inserts examples -
 - ◆ Utility rates (January)
 - ◆ Here to Serve You brochure (January)
(City/school partnership)
 - ◆ Spring clean-up service (April)
 - ◆ City calendar photo contest (June)
 - ◆ Snow emergency service (November)
 - ◆ Christmas tree recycling service (December)
- ___ Provide "Mankato City Update" programs on local public access television.
- ___ Hotsheet projects as needed (complicated, current-event topics lend themselves best to this communication tool.)
- ___ Conduct citizen focus groups as needed.
- ___ Write, edit and publish content on Mankato's web pages.
- ___ Communicate/meet with media representatives as needed.
- ___ Provide communication support to targeted causes such as the U.S. Highway 14 Partnership)
- ___ Publish Mankato's annual calendar.
- ___ Promote and manage annual photo contest. Photos are used in the cities calendar and in various communication pieces throughout the year.

The Public Information **office** appreciates the support and interest of the many people involved in its development and who will be key to its success.

Mankato Area Public Schools Communication Projects

- ___ Enhance Mankato Area Public Schools' web pages.
- ___ American Education Week is an opportunity to build and strengthen partnerships between local schools and communities on behalf of students. Do a promotion and thank you to all staff in celebration of American Education Week (November).
- ___ Organize and conduct a workshop for local real estate agents (provide continuing education credits) about Mankato Area Public Schools offerings as needed..
- ___ Develop public schools programming and air on local public access television.
- ___ Communicate/meet with media representatives as needed.
- ___ Create and implement a schedule, placing the Mankato Area Public Schools' display in various high traffic community locations throughout the year.
- ___ Write, edit and publish news and recognition content on Mankato Area Public Schools web pages.

This communication plan is a document that is a basic blueprint to provide guidance. Since communication is dynamic, this plan will serve as a guide only. Public Information staff is prepared to supplement it and modify and update it as the internal and external environment requires it.

Public Information Director Job Description

DEPARTMENT/DIVISION: Public Information
SUPERVISOR: City Manager
CLASSIFICATION: Full-Time, Exempt, Professional

Definition:

Under the general direction of the City Manager, plans, develops, and implements the city's public information programs; coordinates special projects; and performs administrative, management, and technical responsibilities related to public information programs and special projects.

Equipment / job location:

Office is located in the Intergovernmental Center. This position is also required to travel throughout the community as well as outside the community as projects dictate. Uses personal computer, and common office supplies and equipment.

Essential functions of the job:

- ◆ Develop information programs that inform the public about City affairs, operations, and activities.
- ◆ Develop information programs that maintain a visible and positive image for the City.
- ◆ Counsel the City Manager on methods of responding to situations and trends that are of public concern and assisting the Manager in maintaining favorable relations with the community.
- ◆ Market and promote community-related programs and events.
- ◆ Function as public information source for community/organization.
- ◆ Act as liaison to the media and spokesperson for the city.
- ◆ Prepare and/or review speeches, statements, reports, and testimony to be delivered before legislative, governmental, business, and community organizations.
- ◆ Prepare special interest publications, exhibits, videotapes, newsletters, news releases, flyers, brochures, promotional materials, and other public information devices for internal and external distribution as well as for use in other publications.
- ◆ Establish standards for the format and content of city publications, i.e., newsletters, media releases, bulletins, etc.
- ◆ Provide coaching and feedback to other city employees and elected officials who perform communications functions.
- ◆ Maintain current information on trends, developments, and problems concerning the city to be used in planning public information programs.
- ◆ Audit and review community and public information programs and activities to ensure maximum effectiveness.
- ◆ Conduct a variety of research activities, which include investigation, analyzing and preparing reports with sound analysis and recommendations for presentation to the City Council or other bodies, or for use by the City Manager in decision-making.
- ◆ Coordinate and carry out a wide variety of special projects.
- ◆ Develop and make oral and written presentations.
- ◆ Attendance during regularly scheduled work hours and outside regular hours as necessary.
- ◆ Effective and respectful communication and interactions with other employees, supervisors, individuals from other organizations and citizen customers.
- ◆ Facilitates organizational and community groups.
- ◆ Performs other related functions as assigned or apparent.

Required knowledge and abilities:

- ◆ Considerable knowledge of management principles and practices.
- ◆ Considerable knowledge of program development and management and project management.

Public Information Director Job Description continued

- ◆ Considerable knowledge of municipal services and operations.
- ◆ Considerable knowledge of effective customer services practices.
- ◆ Working knowledge of personal computers, including basic understanding of networks, hardware, and software typically used in office environments.
- ◆ Considerable ability to oversee and motivate staff and volunteers either directly or through others.
- ◆ Considerable ability to manage change and develop solutions to problems.
- ◆ Considerable ability to develop, plan, organize, implement, and monitor programs, policies and projects.
- ◆ Skill in communicating logically, persuasively and accurately in oral and written forms with elected officials, business leaders, community organizations and the public in general.
- ◆ Skill in communicating one-to-one or before groups for the purpose of obtaining or providing information.
- ◆ Skill in communicating programs, projects or events involving diverse groups and factors.
- ◆ Skill in investigating by locating, classifying, and interpreting a variety of informational, financial and statistical data.
- ◆ Ability to work independently and complete assignments from minimal information and under general instructions.
- ◆ Ability to work effectively with co-workers, supervisors, employees, media representatives and citizens.
- ◆ Ability to read and comprehend complex materials.
- ◆ Considerable ability to provide effective leadership and promote teamwork.
- ◆ Considerable ability to deal effectively with people of all backgrounds and to maintain positive and effective working relationships with advisory groups, city officials and the general public.
- ◆ Considerable ability to research and analyze information, utilize resources and develop alternatives.
- ◆ Considerable ability to use creativity and sound judgment to resolve differences and respond to challenges.
- ◆ Considerable ability to see, read and understand a variety of written documents.
- ◆ Considerable ability to use fine motor skills to write and/or type and to operate a personal computer.
- ◆ Working ability to hear and speak to communicate with a large variety of people.
- ◆ Working ability to sit for long periods of time.
- ◆ Working ability to operate a telephone to communicate with staff and the public.
- ◆ Ability to move around indoors and outdoors to photograph and conduct videotaping.
- ◆ Ability to lift and move cameras, video camera, and audio visual equipment, etc. on a continuous basis.
- ◆ Ability to work outdoors during which climate is unable to be controlled and event is unable to be rescheduled.

Minimum Qualifications:

Bachelor degree in Marketing, Public Relations, Journalism, Public Administration, or related field and five (5) years experience in related work for a local government.

Preferred Qualifications:

Minimum qualifications, plus a related Master's degree.

Conditions of Employment:

Must possess a valid Minnesota driver's license. Must comply with organizational and departmental policies.

Public Information Assistant Job Description

DEPARTMENT/DIVISION: Public Information
SUPERVISOR: Public Information Director
CLASSIFICATION: Full-Time, Non-Union, Administrative Support

Definition:

Under the direct supervision of the Public Information Director, the Public Information Assistant will provide support and assistance to the director in carrying out programs of the City of Mankato and Mankato Area Public Schools communications and public relations functions. The Public Information Assistant will coordinate public information programs through mediums including, but not limited to, print, video, radio, Internet and community-based information/education programs.

Equipment/job location:

This position will be located in the Intergovernmental Center. Uses personal computers; digital, video, and 35mm cameras; and general office equipment such as photocopiers, fax machine, and calculator.

Essential functions of the job:

- ◆ Provides communications support in City of Mankato and Mankato Area Public Schools organizations. This includes staying abreast of changes and developments in common practices, policies, and procedures as it relates to communication, drawing upon expertise within the profession and the community.
- ◆ Functions as a public information source for the City of Mankato and Mankato Area Public Schools organizations.
- ◆ Serves as liaison to the media.
- ◆ Writes news releases and articles for publication.
- ◆ Assists in planning, developing, disseminating, and evaluating the effectiveness of a variety of written publications and pieces for target audiences both internally and externally.
- ◆ Writes copy, envisions creative ideas, and coordinates outsourcing, including printing, desktop publishers, graphic artists, photographers, etc.
- ◆ Works with local print, radio, and television on behalf of the City of Mankato and Mankato Area Public School organizations.
- ◆ Produces local government programming, which may include writing scripts, editing or coordinating outsourcing of local government production.
- ◆ Attends meetings on behalf of the City of Mankato and Mankato Area Public Schools Public Information office.
- ◆ Plans and organizes events as needed.
- ◆ Creates, sustains, and manages relationships inside and outside of the City of Mankato and Mankato Area Public Schools organizations. This may include various clubs and organizations.
- ◆ Attendance during regularly scheduled work hours.
- ◆ Effective and respectful communication and interactions with other employees, supervisors, individuals from other organizations and citizen customers.
- ◆ Performs other related functions as assigned or apparent.

Required knowledge and abilities:

- ◆ Must be a self-starter.
- ◆ Must be ambitious, with the ability to follow through with the best way of completing a project, not necessarily the easiest.
- ◆ Ability and desire to work in a fast-paced, deadline-driven environment.
- ◆ Ability to work well alone or as part of a team.
- ◆ Ability to manage multiple project assignments.
- ◆ Effective time management, including effectively managing priorities.
- ◆ Ability to use Word, Page Maker, Quark, Photoshop, PowerPoint, and other software programs.
- ◆ Must be a good listener.

Minimum qualifications:

Training in public relations, marketing, communications, or closely related field; and at least five (5) years of work experience in a public relations field.

Preferred qualifications:

- ◆ Bachelor degree in public relations, marketing, communications, or a closely related field, and at least two years work experience in a public relations field. Experience and proficiency working with PC based word processing and desktop publishing.
- ◆ Experience working for a local government.

Conditions of employment:

Portfolio required if selected for an interview. Must comply with organizational and departmental policies.

Communication Action Plan



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ICMA
PRESS

IQ Report

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Practical Promotion: How to Make Your Community a Winner with Citizens

The business world is loaded with examples of famous marketing and promotional campaigns, but local governments have only recently begun to use the philosophy and principles of modern marketing and promotion. Both economic development and community pride gain from successful government marketing campaigns. It is all too easy to gain the public's attention for controversial issues; it is often more challenging to be noticed for positive accomplishments and successes.

Well-planned communications are the heart of any successful public information effort. A communication program needs to be built on strong themes, not scattered messages, and it needs to highlight priorities and take a proactive approach. Good news can sell.

Traditional methods and messages cannot break through today's media barrage. Doing something out of the ordinary and a lot of fun is much more likely to be remembered. Ask whether your promotion is creative, imaginative, and appropriate. If it's all three, your community will be a winner with its citizens.

Contents

Creating a Positive Community Image:
Bellflower, California

Involving the Public and Strengthening Community:
Decatur, Georgia

Celebrating Success:
Tallahassee, Florida

Building Support for Infrastructure:
Lenexa, Kansas

Forming a City-School Partnership:
Mankato, Minnesota



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Practical Promotion: How to Make Your Community a Winner with Citizens

This report was developed by the City-County Communications and Marketing Association (3CMA). Founded in 1988 in recognition of the increased need for local governments to communicate with their citizens, 3CMA provides creative development opportunities for government marketing and communications professionals through conferences and seminars, forums to exchange ideas and best practices, extensive networking opportunities, and specialized disciplines. An extensive database demonstrates how innovative governments have addressed challenges, engaged citizens, and identified creative solutions to local government issues. Eight hundred and fifty members represent local governments and associated agencies (including health, public safety, transit, and utilities). For more information on 3CMA, visit 3cma.org or call 703-707-0830. Bill Behenna, senior public information officer, Department of Communications, Tallahassee, Florida, contributed the introduction to this report.

For a moment, let's consider several well-known corporate leaders: Starbucks, Gap, United Parcel Service, Nordstrom. All these and countless other companies share two similarities—they're instantly identifiable and they're hugely popular with consumers.

What has made them so successful? Why are some of the most popular U.S. firms virtual pop-culture icons? And what did they do to distinguish themselves from their competition?

Briefly and very much to the point: the answer is marketing and promotion. Marketing—an umbrella term for everything from old-school public information responsibilities, to megasized corporate communications shops, to brand identification efforts—is an essential ingredient for today's American retailers, service providers, and professionals.

The retail world is loaded with famous (and infamous) examples of marketing and promotional campaigns that have not just helped a company sell its products, but have also actually created a new market. Readers in larger cities—and now in some smaller cities, too—have only to think of friends and business associates who drive or walk out of their way just to secure their morning latte, mocha, or other java treat from Starbucks.

And, because economic development has become a high-stakes competition in the local government world, it also makes sense that American cities and counties market themselves. Yet local government jurisdictions have only recently begun to use the philosophy and principles of modern marketing and promotion.

Not only economic development but also community pride is at stake. Local government managers want citizens, now more than ever known as customers, to like where they live, work, and play. They want growth, even if it is conditioned by environmental or geographical considerations. New York will forever be the Big Apple and Chicago the Windy City, but how do the rest of us carve an identity that pleases our current customers and attracts new ones?

Local government communicators are still responsible for basic public information efforts, including emergency response notification and relatively routine issues such as service changes. More often than not, however, today's municipal spokespersons come from advertising and public relations backgrounds, or they move from jobs as traditional reporters or journalists to jobs as marketing specialists. Local government communicators are tasked with far-reaching goals:

- Creating visions for a community
- Developing branding or imaging campaigns
- Educating the electorate to develop voter support for referenda
- Encouraging citizens to be involved in local government issues and initiatives
- Highlighting the quality of life in the community and answering the question, "How do we measure community pride?"
- Differentiating the local community from others in a way that emphasizes positives, not the real or perceived negatives of competing communities.

Fortunately, the creative well runs deep, and professional organizations such as the City-County Communications and Marketing Association (3CMA) are flourishing and providing training opportunities, databases of results-oriented best practices, and other resources to their members.

More important, most city and county leaders now understand the importance of marketing, promotion, and communicating with citizens. Many municipal administrators have elevated the level of professional employees charged with these responsibilities, often placing them at the highest ranks of decision makers. It's no surprise that success stories abound, including the five included in this report. These and many other local governments are marketing and promoting their product just as any successful business would!

Creating a Positive Community Image: Bellflower, California

This case study was written by Jeff Hobbs, public affairs manager, Bellflower, California.

Bellflower, California, located in the southeast region of Los Angeles County, enjoys a diverse population of 77,000. The twenty-fifth largest of the county's eighty-eight cities, Bellflower continues to feel the unfortunate effects of a voter rejection of the formation of a redevelopment agency in the 1980s. As a result, the community saw little retail growth, which was coupled with an increase in crime. Newspaper articles critical of the city as well as businesses deciding to move outside the city limits led to a change in local leadership. The city began replacing tired buildings, eliminating blight, and attracting quality businesses to town.

Part of the city's strategy to improve its image hinged on renewing or creating a positive self-awareness among residents and existing businesses through ongoing favorable media coverage, special events, and community outreach. The program described in this case study achieved all three objectives. In establishing a citizen recognition program called "Bellflower Honors," the city bolstered its image and spotlighted the true spirit of the community—residents, business owners, and groups who call Bellflower home.

Every community in the nation is home to achievers: veterans who've served in combat, couples who've been married fifty years, spelling bee champs, teachers of the year, winning baseball squads, Eagle Scouts, Special Olympians, and volunteers who deliver meals to seniors. They are the heroes and celebrities of their community. Too often, they go unnoticed. Or when they are recognized, the presentation is worked into a regular city council or board meeting, with little ceremony and little impact. The city of Bellflower decided there was a better way. It developed a continuing series of stand-alone ceremonies devoted solely to recognizing community achievers.

Minimum Investment, Maximum Return

First, the city established the broad parameters of the citizen recognition program. How often would the ceremony be held? What criteria would be used to select individuals to be honored? Who was to make the final decision? What specific role would the city council play? Once the framework was established, the focus became clearer and the program was ready to launch.

In Bellflower, the public affairs manager coordinates and manages the recognition program. Honorees are nominated by friends, family, or co-workers. An official nomination form is posted on the city's Web site. Hard-copy forms are sent to service clubs,

churches, hospitals, and schools. The city uses the news media, the official city Web site, and the local community newsletter to promote the call for nominations. Posters are placed in parks and public areas with a lot of foot traffic.

The recognition ceremony is held twice a year, and during each event about ten individuals or groups are singled out for their service or achievement. Before the ceremony, each honoree is interviewed on video, and the piece is edited to reflect the specific achievement. In the case of a couple celebrating fifty years of marriage, for instance, video footage might include their original wedding picture, their home, shots of them holding hands, and the couple speaking about each other to the camera. If the honoree is an art student, video of a work of art might be shown as well as an interview with the student, who could describe the piece of art and its significance.

The theme for each ceremony is selected on the basis of the collective personality of those nominated. For example, if a majority of the winners for a given ceremony are being recognized for volunteerism, the theme might be "giving back" or "making a difference." Similarly, if several military folks are involved, the theme might lean toward "freedom" or "patriotism." In short, possible themes emerge as the list of honorees becomes complete, and one theme is then incorporated into the artwork for the promotional materials, the selection of food, and the stage backdrop. The theme serves as the lead for all elements of the ceremony.

To add to the event's local flavor, an area restaurant is invited to cater the affair, at cost, as a partial community donation. The business is then recognized in all promotional materials and follow-up outreach. All local restaurants are invited to participate, and each is booked according to schedule, theme, and location. A dinner is served buffet style, with restaurant staff setting up and serving. A local singer or musician is invited to perform the national anthem or a song fitting the theme of the ceremony. Because the Pledge of Allegiance is always recited, the city invites a local veteran to lead the pledge as an honorary guest.

Sights on Success

For the ceremony, the city has chosen a space with a staging area and room for adequate seating. The first ceremony, in 2002, was held in a community meeting room and attracted an audience of approximately 100. That was about the maximum the room could hold, so it appeared quite full (a good thing). Before very many ceremonies were held there, however, the room became really too full (a bad thing). The need to accommodate more guests prompted a move to a larger community room at the local park, which

to the Internet, participants are able to share their special moments with friends and loved ones around the globe. Media coverage from radio, TV, and print over the past four years has resulted in more than twenty million positive impressions. Further, the community has celebrated the many success stories that create the heart and soul of Bellflower. A renewed sense of pride has flourished as a direct result of the program.

The breadth of Bellflower Honors ensures an endless supply of service and achievement to recognize. The program also promotes service and achievement by spotlighting role models and bringing recognition to real-life examples of commitment and dedication. The city, in turn, is positioned as valuing its citizens, schools, and businesses. Elected officials are more in touch with the pulse of the community, and they gain insights into a wider channel of programs and services. Residents get to know their elected representatives better. They feel a connection to their leaders, especially because family members often join award recipients, and the entire group shares in the ceremony. Many honorees have written letters to city hall stating that the ceremony was a high point in their lives.

When a government program can engender joy and happiness as well as rank as a high point in the lives of its residents, the city of Bellflower considers it worth the investment.

Involving the Public and Strengthening Community: Decatur, Georgia

This case study was written by Lyn Menne, assistant city manager, community and economic development, Decatur, Georgia; and Linda Harris, assistant director, community and economic development, Decatur, Georgia.

The city of Decatur, Georgia, has a long history of community involvement. Nurturing and maintaining a strong sense of community has been a stated policy goal dating back to the 1960s. It is the city's strong sense of identity and the active involvement of its citizens that are at the heart of Decatur's economic revitalization.

Founded in 1823 as the county seat of DeKalb County, the city of Decatur is located six miles east of Atlanta, Georgia, and has a population of 18,000. Decatur is four square miles in size and is the most densely populated city in the state of Georgia. It operates its own independent school system, with neighborhood schools feeding into one high school, and is also the home of Agnes Scott College and Columbia Seminary. Decatur has a vibrant downtown business district with more than 120 unique shops and res-

taurants and a year-round calendar of special events including an arts festival, a beach party, concerts, a book festival, and beer- and wine-tasting festivals.

The following examples of involvement fall into three categories: citizen participation in planning the future of the community, citizen participation in city programs, and communication and education on the part of the city.

Community Planning and Visioning

Giving citizens a say in how the community grows and develops is an important part of Decatur's strategy.

Decatur roundtables. In preparation for the city's Strategic Plan 2000, we conducted a series of roundtables to get people to think about what they value about Decatur, what their hopes are for the community, and what personal commitments they are willing to make to accomplish their goals. The city hired a consultant to conduct these programs and train a group of local facilitators who could assist with future roundtable sessions. More than five hundred citizens participated in these sessions. Issues identified were included in the strategic planning process. Several groups continue to meet around specific issues and have evolved into established committees or commissions like the Decatur Neighborhood Alliance and the Decatur Greenspace Commission.

Task force process. For every city planning project or large development project, the Decatur city commission appoints a citizen-based task force to define the program, select the consultant team, and serve as the steering committee throughout design and implementation. Task forces traditionally include representatives from the Decatur city commission, the Development Authority Board, and the Decatur Business Association Board as well as several at-large members who represent major stakeholder groups. Every task force works closely with a city staff member. This process has been used for the development of the Downtown Decatur MARTA Plaza Redevelopment Plan, the Decatur-Avondale MARTA Station Study Livable Centers Initiative, the Decatur Town Center Plan, the Citywide Comprehensive Athletic Facility Master Plan, and the redevelopment of the Decatur railroad depot, to name a few examples.

Public Participation in City Programs

Decatur has institutionalized the coordination of volunteerism in the city.

Volunteer! Decatur. Decatur's Strategic Plan 2000 showed strong community support for developing ways to improve community interaction. With a grant from United Way, the city hired a volunteer

Promotional materials for Decatur 101

Decatur 101: Five Weeks of Classes
A Lasting Insight Into Local Government

Class 1: Mission
Location: City Hall
• History of Decatur
• Form of Government
• Strategic Plan
• Economic Development
Meet: Mayor, City Manager, Local Historian, Economic Development Director, Fire Chief
Hands-On Activities: Tour of Fire Station & overview of department, Savannah Hunt, "Find Your House on the Map," see business leaders in city offices

Class 2: Infrastructure
Location: Public Works Building
• Public Works & Development
• Sanitation & Facilities Maintenance
• Engineering
• Building Permits, Inspections, Codes
Meet: Public Works Director, Sanitation and Facilities Maintenance Bureau Director, Engineer, Assistant Engineer, Building Official, Codes Enforcement Officer
Hands-On Activities: Tour of Public Works Building and see various types of vehicles used in public works activities

Class 3: Show Me the Money
Location: Recreation Center
• Administrative Services
• Personnel
• Accounting & Revenue
• Taxes
• Mortgage Rates, Exemptions, Budget Process
Meet: Administrative Services Director, Personnel Administrator, Recreation & Community Services Director
Hands-On Activities: Tour of Recreation Center and overview of department, 100 Percent Budget Exercise

Class 4: Volunteer Boards & Commissions
Location: City Hall
• Planning Board of Appeals, Planning Commission, Waste Management Advisory Board, GreenSpace Commission, Historic Preservation Commission, Licensing Authority, Downtown Development Authority
Meet: Planning Services Officer, A member of each board and commission
Hands-On Activities: Mock Planning Commission meeting

Class 5: Get Involved, Ask Questions, Graduate
Location: City Hall
• Overview of Police Department
• Volunteer "hall" of ideas
• Opportunities to get involved
• Q&A with the City Commissioners
Meet: Police Chief, Sponsor Events Coordinator, Volunteer Center Coordinator, Police Community Relations Coordinator
Hands-On Activities: View police vehicles and equipment, interact with City Commissioners, receive "graduate" certificates and pins, plus refreshments
Certificates distributed by Assistant Director of Community & Economic Development
Optional Saturday Morning Drive Class: Smart Growth-Walking Tour of Downtown

coordinator for the program, "Volunteer! Decatur." The program was so successful that the position was included in the city budget after the grant expired. In addition to coordinating volunteers for festivals, special events, and area social service programs, the volunteer coordinator organizes an annual gift giving for needy Decatur children and seniors during the holiday season and the Martin Luther King Jr. Service Project that pairs volunteers with elderly homeowners to complete home repair projects and yard cleanups. Out of a city of 18,000 residents, this program coordinates more than 1,422 volunteers each year, with a total of 4,130 volunteer hours contributed.

Statements of interest. To identify talented candidates for various city boards and commissions and involve newer residents in the governance process, the city lists vacancies on boards and commissions in the city newsletter and on the city Web site and invites applications. Residents submit a statement of interest similar to a résumé and are invited to interview with the city commission. The process has been successful in getting younger residents involved and assures active, interested, and informed members for important citizen positions.

Festivals and special events. To fund a full-time special events coordinator, the city contributes 50 percent of the salary and benefits; profits from several large community events—through partnerships with the Decatur Arts Alliance, the Tour of Homes Com-

mittee, the Beer Tasting Festival Committee, and the Decatur Business Association—make up the balance of the cost. The special events coordinator organizes logistics for special events, including security and sanitation (using off-duty police officers and public works employees), insurance, permits, port-o-lets, and general event management. Attendance at community festivals and events ranges from five hundred to fifty thousand. More than fifteen hundred volunteers assist with planning and implementing the events.

Communication and Education

It is said that "in the absence of information, people will make up their own." Therefore, the city of Decatur works hard to assure that a variety of educational opportunities is made available to its citizens.

Communication tools. The city of Decatur mails more than ten thousand copies of a monthly newsletter to all residents, business license holders, and all members of the Decatur Business Association. The newsletter keeps the community informed of development issues, policy and program updates, and business and community news. An annual budget of \$53,060 for ten issues takes advantage of \$36,000 in advertising revenue and a \$5,000 contribution from the Decatur Business Association. Thus, the city's annual cost of \$12,060 translates into \$1,206 per issue, or 12¢ per copy. The annual *Activity Book* for children, designed to teach children and their parents about local gov-

Working with Citizens in Ad Hoc Groups

Through its involvement with citizens during the budget process, the city of Decatur, Georgia, has learned to clarify for citizens a couple of aspects of their role as advisers:

- Participants need to know what is expected of them; for example, city staff make it clear that the focus group is an information-sharing forum, not a board with formal authority to make recommendations to the staff or commission
- Participants need to be aware of the scope of the discussion; for example, when the first advisory group learned that the school budget was not part of the city budget and therefore would not be discussed, half of the group left, saying they were satisfied with the city's budget.

ernment, and an annual report that informs residents about the structure of city government and annual milestones are included as inserts in the monthly newsletter at a cost of approximately \$2,000. All publications are also posted online at decaturga.com.

Decatur 101. Over the course of five weeks, participants in Decatur 101 tour city buildings, meet city staff, participate in a mock planning commission meeting, and have a chance to create their own city budget using one hundred pennies. Since the inception of the program, nine classes have completed the course. One goal is to educate and inform and another goal is to develop an involved citizenry. All of the 270 graduates have become involved in Decatur in some way: four are now elected officials, and others have applied for various volunteer boards and commissions, chaired special events, served on event and service project committees, and become leaders in their neighborhoods and active, involved citizens. Class size is limited to thirty to forty participants, and each class has been completely full with a waiting list. In 2006 the city added a morning class in addition to the evening class, and both classes were full. Costs associated with Decatur 101 include an initial graphic design fee of \$1,050. Annual cost per person is approximately \$20.25 and includes a notebook, photocopies of information, graduation certificate and T-shirt, and reception.

The assistant director for community and economic development coordinates and facilitates Decatur 101. Members of the city management team participate in individual classes according to the class schedules and their areas of expertise. By the end of the term, participants have met all of the department and division heads and know whom to call with

questions about sanitation, budget, police, fire, development, and other specific issues.

Budget focus groups. Before the city's annual budget process starts, city staff conduct a series of focus-group meetings, inviting individuals who have attended budget hearings or have contacted city hall about the budgeting process to attend and share their issues, concerns, and ideas for spending city tax dollars. The forty to fifty citizens who have participated since the program began in 2002 get an up-close view of how the annual budget is created and the hard choices that need to be made. The focus group's concerns and priorities have helped guide the budget decision-making process, and feedback from participants has made a positive impact. For example, the city now documents the linkage between departmental activities and the goals and objectives in the city's strategic plan.

All of these efforts go hand in hand in creating informed, engaged, and involved citizens who are active in our life as a community.

Celebrating Success: Tallahassee, Florida

This case study was written by M. Michelle Bono, assistant to the city manager, Tallahassee, Florida.

Tallahassee, Florida, home to 175,000, is Florida's capital city and center of higher education. Florida State University, Florida A&M University, and Tallahassee Community College together serve more than sixty thousand students, many of whom remain in the community after graduation. Because of the students, our community is the youngest in the state, and residents young and old alike are active participants in a variety of readily available recreation opportunities. With a canopy of oaks shading its roads, an extensive park system, and more than three hundred miles of trails for walking, biking, and hiking, the city has enjoyed strong citizen support for its commitment to our natural environment. The community is also known for its focus on technology as well as its southern hospitality. Citizens of Tallahassee have high expectations and consistently rate the quality of city services high, with an 80 percent approval rating in the 2003 and 2006 citizen surveys.

That level of satisfaction is achieved, in part, through citizen involvement, a focus on customer service, a commitment to accountability and openness, and clear and effective communication by the city—all in support of the city commission's goal of enhancing citizen confidence in government. It is easy to garner the community's attention for controversial issues, but it is often more challenging to be noticed for positive accomplishments and successes.

Brand the Award

In October 2004, the Tallahassee Parks and Recreation Department won the prestigious national gold-medal award for excellence in parks and recreation management from the National Recreation and Park Association. It is the highest honor for a municipal or state parks and recreation department—the Academy Award of the parks and rec field. The honor recognizes all aspects of the department, including long-range planning, budget growth, attention to the environment, diverse program offerings, citizen participation, and parks maintenance.

The award represented an opportunity to thank residents for their ongoing support of the city's parks and recreation program and to bring regional and national attention to the city to assist in economic development efforts. It was also seen as a way to

help position the city favorably during its upcoming negotiations with Leon County; the city was seeking additional financial support from the county for city parks and recreation services used by county residents. The award also recognized the active lifestyle of many Tallahassee citizens and the community's involvement in recreational programs. The challenge was how to bring the award to life and create pride in this accomplishment.

The city, with a limited budget of \$10,000, drafted a communications plan to reach the entire Tallahassee metropolitan area. The plan incorporated media relations, special events, advertising, signage, outreach to local organizations, internal communications, a special newspaper insert, and promotion on the Internet, with synergy among all components.

The first step in the plan to share the celebration with residents was to simplify the message. The gold-

Ten Tips for Great Publicity

- 1. Be creative, even with a low budget.** Use the resources in your community. Many local businesses are willing to support high visibility, positive campaigns. Offer businesspeople something in return: special recognition on the Web, an opportunity to be recognized at special events, or sponsorship.
- 2. Bring in the media early as sponsors or participants.** Billboard companies are often willing to donate board space if you pay for the printing. Having high-profile members of the news media as judges for any competition increases chances that the media will cover your event.
- 3. Use local talent.** Citizens love to be featured in outreach efforts. They can be your stars on government access TV programs, in brochures, and on the Web. Plus, citizens will participate for free for a moment in the spotlight.
- 4. Include everyone.** With the Internet, you can post online all the "stars" that don't make it into your print publications or onto the billboards or bus promotions. The Internet also allows each star's relatives to easily find junior's celebrity photo, and it draws more people to your government Web site to learn about other city services.
- 5. Feature local kids.** If you want attention, include activities for kids at every special event. Highlighting kids in promotions also means moms, dads, and all the relatives are sure to want to see the results of your campaign.
- 6. Even better, feature local kids and their pets.** The only thing better than kids is kids and pets! The city's parks campaign received front-page local newspaper attention with an in-depth look at the red-haired boy with his pooch featured on a billboard about the city's dog park. The dog had been adopted from the city's animal shelter and was the reading buddy for the boy. It doesn't get any better!
- 7. Maximize existing resources.** Create synergy for your promotions by using all existing resources—local government access TV, the Web, the sides of buses, the messages citizens hear when they call government offices and are put on hold, inserts in utility bills, and speeches. Every outreach is an opportunity to promote your message.
- 8. Know what you want to accomplish strategically and how to measure your results.** What gets measured gets done and gets funded. Be able to show how your promotion benefited the community by recording the number of people who attended, the number who received your publications and outreach, and, most important, the positive change in attitudes among local residents via a statistically valid, random-sample survey.
- 9. Focus on why your citizens and customers should care, and use that mind-set to form your key messages.** Citizens don't care about government winning awards, but they do care about having the best parks, or the safest streets, or the cleanest neighborhoods. Make sure your message is targeted to your audience.
- 10. Have some fun!** Staid, old-school messages never punch through. Doing something out of the ordinary, a little zany, and fun is much more likely to be remembered. Don't worry about the curmudgeon or two—you'll never win them over. Focus on reaching the community at large.

medal award encompassed every aspect of the department, from environmental stewardship and program offerings to long-range planning and budget. To condense all that into one compelling message, the city developed a tagline for the campaign: "Named Best in America." We created a campaign logo in an easily recognizable gold-ribbon shape that communicated a winning image even when seen from far away. The logo was used in all aspects of the awareness campaign. In addition, a Web site—talgov.com/parks/bia/index.cfm—was created to highlight Tallahassee's award.

Campaign Components

The three major components were a billboard campaign, a special insert in the local newspaper, and a community celebration. Through a partnership with an advertising firm, the city was able to secure billboards strategically placed throughout the community that would reach at least 50 percent of Tallahassee residents. Because the primary criterion for the award was citizen participation, Tallahassee citizens were characterized as the stars of the campaign. An open "casting call" invited residents to pose for photos for the billboards, and any photos that were not used were posted on the city's Web site. Each billboard illustrated the concept of Tallahassee being the best. Headlines included "Top of the Heap," featuring a photo of a pile of football players in youth athletic

programs, and "Head of the Class," featuring adults in an arts and crafts class. "Top Dog" showcased a young city resident with his dog at one of the city's dog parks, and about a hundred citizens helped form a human number one by standing in an outline of the numeral while a photo was taken from the platform of a fire department ladder truck.

To reach even more citizens, the city worked with the local newspaper to create a special tabloid insert, which was underwritten by local businesses, that touted every aspect of the award. The insert was published the day before a community celebration held at a city park. More than seven hundred residents attended the event. City staff handed out free branded T-shirts, stickers, and chocolate "gold medals," and the mayor and city commissioners unveiled the first billboard and thanked residents for helping Tallahassee become the best in America.

These three major components were supplemented over several months with articles in utility bill inserts, a special reception during a city commission meeting, recognition in the employee newsletter, special recognition by the chamber of commerce, programs on the city's TV channel, promotion on the city's Web site, and a special focus during the annual Winter Festival that has been organized by the department for the past two decades. The final touches included signage in all city parks. The department receptionist answered the phone with "Tallahassee Parks and Recreation—named best in America."

Tallahassee billboards



The Outcome

The city hit one out of the park with this campaign. More than one thousand residents took part in the casting call and community event where they were brought face-to-face with the best-in-America message. Local businesses underwrote nearly all the publications and events, allowing the city to stay within its small budget and still make a bang. At the community celebration, 69 percent of those surveyed said the award enhanced their confidence in local government. The mayor and commissioners were among the best ambassadors, highlighting the accomplishment in every speech and presentation. Most telling was the 2006 citizen survey in which 75 percent of residents indicated they had used city parks and rec services, and 84 percent rated the city's parks and rec program as good or excellent. Even those not using the services gave them high ratings!

"For the price of a Whopper and fries, the unincorporated residents are going to have access to the number one parks and recreation system in the country."

In addition, a dollars-and-cents benefit was that the city and county were able to reach a new inter-local agreement that included increased county support for city parks and recreation services. A media story about the agreement quoted a county official: "For the price of a Whopper and fries, the unincorporated residents are going to have access to the number one parks and recreation system in the country."

The campaign highlighted the fact that good news can sell—particularly when the stars are your own citizens. The strategic focus on the award also helped to build the city's goodwill bank with its citizenry, which helps solidify consumer loyalty. And the award and campaign provided even more positive attention to a fundamental city service already well regarded by citizens.

Building Support for Infrastructure: Lenexa, Kansas

This case study was written by Susanne Neely, public communications coordinator, Lenexa, Kansas.

Lenexa, Kansas, which was incorporated in 1907, is a rapidly growing city, adding about a thousand new residents per year, in the Kansas City metropolitan area. With 47,000 residents and a daytime population roughly double that, Lenexa is home to numerous bioscience and high-tech companies as well as major corporations such as Community America Credit

Union and PRA International; by the end of 2007 it will also be the home of Applebee's International. Lenexa has a reputation as a progressive, technology-savvy city, yet its citizens enjoy a hometown sense of community, and it is known throughout the area as the "city of festivals."

In the late 1990s, a community-visioning process led to a new, innovative approach to managing stormwater. Although Lenexa usually does not have major flooding problems, a severe flood that hit the metropolitan area in October 1998—one of the worst in the area's history—as well as new requirements imposed by the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Phase II of the Clean Water Act and the impending development of the largely undeveloped western two-thirds of the city reinforced the importance of the community's vision and the city's efforts.

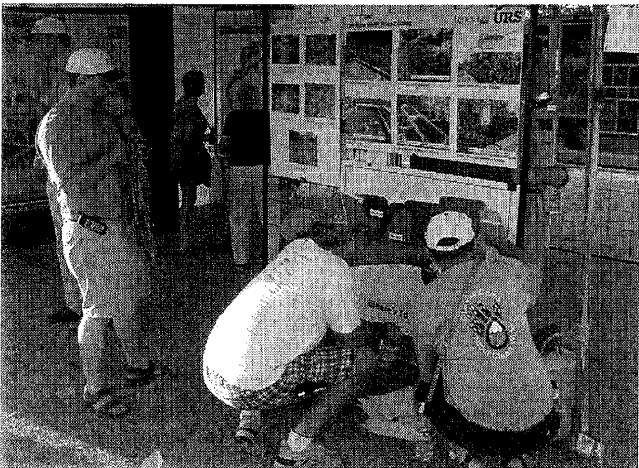
First, city officials took a hard look at the existing watershed management program. Lenexa wanted to learn from previous mistakes and find a better way to manage stormwater, particularly as new development accelerated in the western part of the city. Like many other cities that believe stormwater is a problem that needs to be moved away quickly, Lenexa had been moving stormwater by collecting and channeling it through gutters, boxes, pipes, and culverts. In some areas, this was causing local flooding, erosion, and massive stream degradation that were expensive to repair.

Rain to Recreation

Taking a new approach, Lenexa began looking at stormwater as a community asset and a valuable resource rather than a problem. The city created a new program: "Rain to Recreation." The goals of Rain to Recreation are to reduce flooding; protect water quality, natural habitat, and the environment; and provide new recreation and education opportunities for the community. To reach these goals, Lenexa planned to reduce flooding by building new lakes, detention basins, wetlands, streamside parks, and trails and create educational programs to increase community awareness of water quality issues.

Public Education

Lenexa's governing body and staff understood that it was vital to communicate with all of the city's audiences as the city developed the new regional watershed approach to managing stormwater. Lenexa sits on four watersheds, which are shared with neighboring communities, and it was going to need support from many different groups, including the business community, the development community, the media, neighboring cities, and the county. Equally important, it was critical that Lenexa had the support of its citizens, who would be asked to help pay for the initiative with a one-eighth-cent sales tax increase.



Lenexa's Waterfest educates citizens

The city was hopeful because in 1999 a citizen survey indicated that 80 percent of respondents were interested in water quality as it related to their quality of life and would be willing to pay for a watershed management program. That was a general survey, however, and because Lenexa now wanted to move forward with an innovative stormwater program, the city felt that strong citizen support for both the concept and the funding was absolutely critical.

A regional approach to stormwater management was not common in 2000, and the city felt it would be a challenge to generate understanding and buy-in from all stakeholders. Great effort was made to communicate with the many stakeholders. The mayor and members of a citizen support group spoke at numerous meetings and question-and-answer sessions with the economic development council, media editorial boards, chamber of commerce, the development community, civic groups, PTAs, church groups, and neighborhood associations.

Play to Strengths

In August of 2000, citizens were going to be asked to help fund the Rain to Recreation initiative by voting

for a one-eighth-cent sales tax increase. Because it was so important to gain citizen understanding and support of Rain to Recreation, the city decided to play to one of its strengths as it sought to communicate the new initiative to citizens.

Each year, Lenexa hosts tens of thousands of people at annual events including the Great Lenexa Barbeque-Kansas State Championship, the Freedom Run, the July 4th parade and fireworks, the Spinach Festival, the Chili Challenge, Enchanted Forest, and the Old Town Lighting Ceremony.

So, in preparation for the August referendum, Lenexa created another festival—"Waterfest."

Waterfest a Communications Tool

Waterfest supported the Rain to Recreation concept of raising public awareness of water quality and stormwater issues by bringing neighbors together in a festival setting. A free event targeting Lenexa citizens and families, it featured numerous interactive, educational booths as well as many water-related activities, including canoeing, cane-pole fishing, paddle boats, waterslides, wacky water games, and a children's fishpond and duck pond. Presentations by Operation Wildlife; Green E, the environmental Elvis who performs songs with an environmental message put to tunes of favorite Elvis hits; and a local band called Rain Dogs entertained the participants.

When organizing Waterfest, Lenexa set out to

- Create a unique event that would attract Lenexa citizens, particularly families with children, to learn about the importance of the city's innovative Rain to Recreation initiative and the funding that would be necessary, as well as a variety of water quality, stormwater, and other environmental issues
- Provide a fun and festive atmosphere in which neighbors could gather and enjoy water-related activities and celebrate water as a community asset
- Partner with various environmental groups that would provide interactive, educational booths about water quality and stormwater management and further support the city's watershed management initiatives
- Provide a venue for soliciting public opinion on project elements, including park facilities.

Success

After the first Waterfest was held in July 2000, 78 percent of Lenexa's citizens approved the one-eighth-cent sales tax increase to assist in the funding of Rain to Recreation. Waterfest was so well received that the city decided to make it an annual event, and it attracts several thousand citizens each year. The

city receives valuable input from attendees about the city's Rain to Recreation efforts and has the opportunity to demonstrate how funds are being used toward vital projects.

The city has been able to keep costs down by

- Securing federal water quality grant money administered through the Kansas Department of Health and Environment
- Partnering with local businesses to provide food and other items for the festival
- Promoting Waterfest through numerous communications tools already in existence to cut down on promotion costs.

Annual promotion and media coverage of Waterfest adds to the positive message citizens receive about the city's efforts to deal with stormwater issues and protect water quality, whether or not they attend the event.

Various environmental and civic groups concerned with water quality and environmental issues participate by hosting booths at Waterfest: the Johnson County Household Hazardous Waste Program, Johnson County Public Works Department, Johnson County Wastewater Department, Blue River Watershed Association, Kansas Alliance for Wetlands and Streams, Project WET, Sierra Club, Mid-America Regional Council, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 7, Grow Native!, Kansas Wildscape Foundation, Habitat ReStores, and Operation WildLife as well as the city's Rain to Recreation Watershed Management Division and the city's Parks and Recreation Department.

Citizen participation and public education are large parts of water programs in Lenexa. Public education is very important, and information is provided on the Web, in the citizen newsletter, and during public meetings. In addition, the city participates in several regional environmental fairs and events during the year. Lenexa organizes Earth Day events and storm drain-marking events that provide an education component, and it is about to launch stream teams to help clean and care for city streams. Lenexa teams up with the county for household hazardous waste collection events as well as the citizen education that precedes them. The annual Waterfest celebrates water quality and provides information in a fun and entertaining environment.

When citizens were asked to renew the one-eighth-cent sales tax increase for an additional five years, which would fulfill the ten-year funding plan necessary for Rain to Recreation, the annual Waterfest was again used in coordination with other communications efforts—including a speakers' bureau and a Rain to Recreation video sent to homes, associations,

Waterfest: Costs and Staffing

A typical annual budget for Waterfest:

Entertainment	\$1,500
Refreshments	165 ^a
Advertising	550
Promotional giveaways	1,550

Staffing of Waterfest is handled with a combination of staff members from the Department of Parks and Recreation and Watershed Management. Community volunteers are also an important component of staffing for Waterfest.

^a Most refreshments are donated, although in 2006 the city had to purchase additional bottled water

and other groups in the community—to inform citizens about the city's Rain to Recreation progress.

Since Lenexa's first Waterfest and successful passage of the sales tax increase, Lenexa has completed its first two regional lakes, which provide regional water retention in the developing part of the community, and very soon will offer new opportunities for education and recreation. In the 2004 election, 78 percent of citizens once again approved the tax increase. The current one-eighth-cent sales tax will sunset in 2010.

In August of 2006, Lenexa held its seventh annual Waterfest. The city's Rain to Recreation initiative and Waterfest serve as models for other communities locally and throughout the country.

Forming a City-School Partnership: Mankato, Minnesota

This case study was written by Shelly Schulz, public information director, Mankato, Minnesota.

Mankato, Minnesota, is a regional center in southern Minnesota. A city on the Minnesota River with a council-manager form of government, it has a population of 32,427 and a trade area population of 330,424. Mankato is ranked the fourteenth most livable metropolitan city in the nation according to the *New Rating Guide to Life in America's Small Cities*.

Almost a decade ago, the city of Mankato and the Mankato Area Public Schools made a commitment to partner for public information. Although each organization provides a different public service, they serve common stakeholders, and they both place a high priority on communicating with taxpayers effectively. To avoid duplication and save money, the schools contracted with the city to provide public information services. This public information model is practical

and transferable to other governments, and it showcases services offered by both entities that enhance citizens' and Mankato's quality of life.

Partnership goals are to avoid duplication in order to save money and share costs, to solve problems common to both organizations, to promote together the value of education and city services, and to become more efficient by being better informed about each other's issues. Geography is an important part of what makes this city-school partnership work because all the land of the city of Mankato is within the boundaries of the Mankato Area Public Schools.

Scope of Services in the Mankato-Mankato Schools Contract

The contractual relationship between the city and the schools specifies the following scope of services for the city's public information director:

- Update and implement a communications plan
- Develop information programs that inform the public about school affairs, operation, and activities
- Develop information programs that maintain a visible and positive image for the schools
- Assist school officials in maintaining favorable relations with the community
- Market and promote school programs and events within the community
- Function as a public information source
- Act as liaison with the media and possibly act as spokesperson
- Prepare publications, presentations, video presentations, news releases, flyers, brochures, promotional materials, and other public information pieces for internal and external distribution
- Provide guidance and feedback to employees and elected officials who perform communication functions
- Maintain current information on trends, developments, and opportunities to be used in planning and implementing public information programs
- Develop and make oral and written presentations
- Provide direction for future communication strategies.

Several specialized services are available at additional cost:

- Web site maintenance
- Printing
- Advertising campaigns
- Surveys.

Plan the Message

Well-planned communications are the heart of any successful public information effort. A communication program built on strong themes, not scattered messages, is usually most effective. Because the primary focus is to be in alignment with local citizens, a good communication plan highlights priorities and takes a proactive approach in planning and executing communication. Residents want staff to be responsive to their needs. Two-way communication is the core of knowing what citizens want.

Communication priorities and themes come from the strategic plans of the Mankato city council and the board of the Mankato Area Public Schools. Many citizens perceive these two bodies as one entity, not as individual boards. City councilors and school board members share an interest in communicating their collective policy message about the future of the city and the schools, and public information is key to doing this.

Shared Projects and Measurable Results

Mankato has discovered several advantages to the combined public information program: it cuts costs, increases the value of communications, and leads to cooperative efforts.

Halving publication costs. When the city and the schools share a print project, the cost to each organization is cut in half. For example, the *City-School News* is a sixteen-page, tabloid-size newsprint project with eight pages devoted to city business and eight pages devoted to school business. The center spread is dedicated to representing a topic the city and the schools are working on together. Outside the city limits, the newsletter becomes an eight-page *School News* (newsletter) and is delivered to the schools' expanded target audience. The newsletter won a first-place national Savvy award from 3CMA, but the ultimate vote of confidence came from a citizen who paid in full with a personal check for the first issue largely because it was a city-school communication partnership.

"Here to Serve You" is an annual brochure that highlights contact information for both city officials and school officials and makes it easy to locate local government telephone numbers. It is posted on the Web sites of the city and the schools and is distributed in the city's utility bills once each year.

Doubling the value of city and school communications. Carrying forward a thirty-seven-year tradition, the city publishes a calendar designed to communicate information about public meeting dates and locations, contact information, twenty-four-hour service numbers, and key city service messages. City council



and school board meetings are an important part of the calendar content, giving a double local government communication value to citizens.

Local realtors are an excellent resource for attracting people to the city and schools. Mankato realtors participate in a seminar at which the city and schools describe the diverse offerings of Mankato Area Public Schools and provide information promoting the city and its quality of life. Throughout the year, realtors are given packets of information about the city and the schools that they then can give to families who are shopping for new homes. Even for families without children or whose children are grown and on their own, the issue of school quality is important because it affects the value of all homes.

Information about the local schools, especially high-performing systems like Mankato's, also supports economic development because, in addition to infrastructure and the labor market, the quality of education is often important to businesses as they consider whether to invest or reinvest in an area.

"A Great Place to Work" is a brochure that showcases the Mankato Area Public Schools yet is a shared city-school message because quality of life is often a priority for people who are considering employment with the city as well.

Finally, when there is a benefit in sharing information, news releases are shared with city and school internal audiences.

Solving problems together. Public information staff serve both the city and the schools if there is a need for communication during a crisis. City and school staff find it easy to cooperate during emergencies because relationships are already in place. One set of planning efforts serves both organizations. A local public information team is ready to assemble in the event of a larger crisis.

Joint media training ensures that officials in both organizations treat media requests as a priority and

Guiding Principles and Philosophy for Public Communications in Mankato

The following principles and philosophy guide combined communications for the city and the schools in Mankato:

- **Tell our own story and don't expect others to do it.** It's the news media's job to report news; it's Mankato's job to be accountable and keep citizens informed about the state of the city and schools.
- **Be proactive, not reactive.** When residents are well informed, they can participate more effectively in their government and make the best decisions on matters affecting their lives.
- **Be decentralized, not centralized.** A decentralized communications system complements operating with a spirit of full disclosure. Decentralized communication can be a practical way to operate in a large organization because the obvious source of information is the person who works in a specific area each day. To best serve citizens, it is ideal for all city and school staff to participate in marketing and communication; it gets the message out quickly, and the message is coming from the people who are most closely connected with the issue.
- **Use strong themes, not scattered messages.** Key themes will be communicated frequently in a variety of ways with simple, repetitive messages.
- **Adopt the public relations philosophy of the Mankato Area Council for Quality.** The council says, "Customers don't care how much we know until they know how much we care."
- **Communicate appropriately but be willing to take risks.** In addition to being factual and professional, marketing and communication messages should be easy to read, entertaining, eye-catching, positive, and imaginative enough to pique interest and capture the attention of stakeholders. Our three criteria are: Is it creative? Is it imaginative? Is it appropriate?
- **Be open to communication partnerships within the geographical boundaries of the target audience of Mankato Area Public Schools.**

that both the city and the schools achieve their commitment to fairness, consistency, responsibility, and coordination.

Conducting a citizen satisfaction survey using an instrument that covers city and school questions means citizens are surveyed only once; as a bonus, the surveying costs are halved for each organization. With dollars tightening, innovative partnerships benefit all stakeholders and generate a service solution that creates successful and efficient local government.



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